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TRANSCENDENTALISM.

BY

WILLIAM B. GREENE.

"Rich is that universal self whom thou worshippest as the soul"

THE VEDAS.

5434

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To

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

The Following Pages

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BY THE AUTHOR.

TRANSCENDENTALISM.

Transcendentalism is that form of philosophy which sinks God and nature in man. God, man, and nature, in their relations (if indeed the absolute God may be said ever to be in relations), are the objects of all philosophy; but, in different theories, greater or less prominence is given to one or the other of these three, and thus systems are formed. Pantheism sinks man and nature in God; materialism sinks God and man in the universe; transcendentalism sinks God and nature in man. In other words, some, in philosophizing, take their point of departure in God alone, and are inevitably conducted to pantheism; others take their point of departure in nature alone, and are led to materialism; others start with man alone, and end in transcendentalism.

It is by no means difficult to deny in words the actual existence of the outward universe. I may say, for example, that the paper on which I write has no more outward existence than the thoughts I refrain from expressing. When I say I perceive an outwardly existing tree, I may be mistaken: what I call

a tree may have no outward existence, but may, on the contrary, be created in my perception. Who knows that a thing which appears red to me may not appear blue to my neighbor? If so, then is color something which I lend to the object. But why stop at color? Perhaps hardness and weight have no existence save that which the mind gives. "Whether Nature enjoy a substantial existence without," says Mr. Emerson, — the profoundest metaphysician, after Jonathan Edwards, which this country has ever produced, — "or is only in the apocalypse of the mind, it is alike useful and alike venerable to me. Be it what it may, it is ideal to me so long as I cannot try the accuracy of my senses." "What differs it to me," he asks on another page, "whether Orion be up there in heaven, or some god paint the image in the firmament of the soul?"

Fabre d'Olivet believed the outward universe to be so dependent upon the individual soul, that we may properly be said to create it ourselves. He thought that we ourselves produce all forms and the world, and that we may create whatever we will, isolatedly and instantaneously. In truth, if all outward things depend for their being, and manner of existence, upon ourselves and upon our inward states, a change in those states involves a change in outward nature. If we discover, therefore, the connection of our thoughts and feelings with outward nature, the whole universe is in our power; and we may, by a modification of ourselves, change the world from its present state into what we all wish it might become. This thought gives the foundation for a system of magic. Mr.

Alcott (an accomplished adept in pantheistic theosophy) thinks the world would be what it ought to be were he only as holy as he should be: he also considers himself personally responsible for the obliquity of the earth's axis. A friend once told me, while we watched large flakes of snow as they were slowly falling, that, could we but attain to the right spiritual attitude, we should be able to look on outward nature, and say, "*I* snow, *I* rain." In the eighth number of "The Dial" we find a beautiful poem touching upon this theory, from which we make an extract: —

"All is but as it seems, —
The round, green earth,
With river and glen;
The din and mirth
Of the busy, busy men;
The world's great fever,
Throbbing forever:
The creed of the sage,
The hope of the age,
All things we cherish,
All that live and all that perish, —
THESE ARE BUT INNER DREAMS.

The great world goeth on
To thy dreaming;
To thee alone
Hearts are making their moan,
Eyes are streaming.
Thine is the white moon turning night to day;
Thine is the dark wood sleeping in her ray;
Thee the winter chills;
Thee the spring-time thrills:
All things nod to thee;
All things come to see

If thou art dreaming on:
IF THY DREAM SHOULD BREAK,
AND THOU SHOULDST AWAKE,
ALL THINGS WOULD BE GONE.*

Nothing is if thou art not.
Thou art under, over all;
Thou dost hold and cover all;
Thou art Atlas, THOU ART JOVE;
THE MIGHTIEST TRUTH
HATH ALL ITS YOUTH
FROM THY ENVELOPING THOUGHT."

In this extract the poet makes man to be the only real existence, and outward nature to be a mere phenomenon dependent upon him. Man is represented as existing really, actually, absolutely; but nature as an accident, an appearance, a consequent upon the existence of the human soul. Thus is the universe sunk, swallowed up, in man. The concluding seven lines of the extract are an example of the transcendental theology, an example of the swallowing-up of God himself in man.

Materialism affirms that man is the result of organ-

* The following lines, from Shelley, are to the same point: —

"Earth and ocean,
Space, and the isles of life and light that gem
The sapphire floods of interstellar air;
This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,
Whose outwall, bastioned impregnably
Against the escape of boldest thoughts, repels them
As Calpe the Atlantic clouds; this whole
Of suns and worlds and men and beasts and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to be, —
IS BUT A VISION: all that it inherits
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles, and dreams;
THOUGHT IS ITS CRADLE AND ITS GRAVE."

ization, and denies the existence of separate and individual souls, thus sinking man in nature: it also identifies God with the active powers of the universe. As Pantheism sinks man and nature in God, so materialism sinks God and man in the universe. Our transcendentalists are, by no means, always consistent. Sometimes they express themselves in a way that leaves us in doubt whether they are not, at bottom, materialists. For example, the poem from which the foregoing extracts are quoted is followed by another, from the same author, but of clearly opposite tenor. We quote a few lines: —

"Dost thou dream that thou art free,
Making, destroying all that thou dost see,
In the unfettered might of thy soul's liberty?
Lo! an atom crushes thee;
One nerve tortures and maddens thee;
One drop of blood is death to thee.
THE MIGHTY VOICE OF NATURE
IS THY PARENT, NOT THY CREATURE;
IS NO PUPIL, BUT THY TEACHER:
AND THE WORLD WOULD STILL MOVE ON
WERE THY SOUL FOREVER FLOWN.
For while thou dreamest on, infolded
In Nature's wide embrace,
All thy life is daily moulded
By her informing grace;
And time and space must reign
And rule o'er thee forever,
And the outworld lift its chain
From off thy spirit never."

Here the soul is evidently sunk in Nature: it is, to use a mathematical expression, considered as a *func-*

tion of the universe. — But we ought not to have separated these passages; for the poet aims to show that transcendentalism and materialism, liberty and fatality, are two sides of one truth.

Having spoken thus far of some of the peculiar characteristics of the transcendental school of philosophy, we shall now take occasion to say a few words concerning its origin and development. But here it will be necessary to treat of the philosophy of Kant, a subject not easily handled. The fundamental postulate of the philosopher of Königsberg may, however, initiate the reader into the whole system. Here it is, as near as we recollect it: —

"If any truth be present to the mind with a conviction of its universality and necessity, that truth was derived to the mind from its own operations, and does not rest upon observation and experience:

"And, conversely, if any truth be present to the mind with a conviction of its contingency, that truth was derived to the mind from observation and experience, and not from the operations of the mind itself."

For example, we know that every effect must have its cause; and this truth lies in the mind with a conviction of its universality and necessity: this truth is derived, therefore, not from observation and experience, but from the operations of the mind itself; it is born, not from outward nature, but in and from the mind itself. In other words, to express ourselves after the manner of the Scotch school, we are forced by the very constitution of our being to admit this truth; so that the recognition of the principle of

causation may be said to be a law of our intellectual natures.

On the other hand, we say, We know the sun will rise to-morrow; but we are not absolutely certain of the fact. This second truth lies, therefore, in our minds, with a conviction of its contingency, and not of its necessity; and is, consequently, not derived from a law of our intellectual natures, but from observation and experience.

By every fact of experience, a revelation is made to the soul, not only of the idea which it has appropriated to itself, but also of those conditions of the external world, and of its own nature, which rendered that acquisition possible. For example, when we perceive moonlight, it is necessary (1) that there should be something out of us to produce the effect of moonlight upon our sensibility, and also (2) certain internal faculties which are responsive to the influences of moonlight. Without the outward object there is no perception, and without the inward faculties there is likewise no perception: for the moon shines upon the trees as well as upon me; but the trees perceive nothing, being devoid of the perceiving faculty. Again: the idea I have of moonshine might have been made to be other than it is by a change, either, first, in the outward object; or, second, in my perceiving faculty. Had the moonshine been different, it would have produced a different effect upon my sensibility, and, consequently, the idea would have been different; had my perceiving faculty been different, the influence or effect of the moonshine would have been different, and the idea

resulting would likewise have been different. All this is plain. Now, the faculties of the mind are supposed to be permanent, and to always operate in the same manner: therefore the truths given by the faculties, where nothing from the external word intervenes, are universal and necessary. But the outward world is given as always changing: therefore the truths given by observation and experience alone, are always contingent. Perhaps we can make this plainer by an illustration.

A nail-machine is composed of a pair of strong shears, which are made to do their work sometimes by steam, sometimes by water-power. A man stands before the machine, and inserts the end of an iron plate between the two blades of the shears when they open: when the shears shut, they cut off a nail from this plate; and this nail depends for its size and shape upon the form of the shears. Let us suppose the machine to be in operation, and the plate to be inserted. The machine says, I perceive something hard, black, cold: what is this something I perceive? In answer, the shears close, and the nail is cut off, and rattles away into the box. Ah, ha! says the machine, I now begin to see into the mystery of the impressions of which I was conscious a moment ago. It was a tenpenny-nail that produced the impressions, — a long and four-sided substance, sharp at one end, and flat at the other. By this time the shears close again; and the machine says, Another tenpenny-nail, by all that is glorious! This acquisition of knowledge is beginning to be interesting. I must know a little more of the philosophy of

this business. So the machine goes on to soliloquize. Listen! —

I have now, says the machine, in my experience, memory, or nail-box, several tenpenny-nails. These were undoubtedly acquired from the external world, and are all that I have as yet acquired from that world. Therefore, if aught beside tenpenny-nails exist in the external world, I have no conception of such existence; and that world is, consequently, for me, a collection of tenpenny-nails. The following appear, therefore, to be unvarying laws of actual existence: (1) All things are long and four-sided; and (2) all things are sharp at one end, and flat at the other.

But stop! says the machine — let us beware of hasty inductions. An idea strikes me! About these same nails: I am not so clear that they were not formed by the concurrent action of two agents. Perhaps the material was furnished by external nature; while the form resulted from the law of my nature, the constitution of my shears, of my own nail-making being. The following conclusion, at least, cannot be shaken: I may look upon every nail from two distinct points of view, — first as to its material, and second as to its form. The material undoubtedly comes from without, and is variable: some nails are of brass, some are of iron; but the form is invariable, and comes from within. All my nails must be long and four-sided, and that universally and necessarily; but the material may vary, being sometimes brass, sometimes iron. This is plain: for I acquire all my nails according to the law of my nail-making being; that

is, translating from scientific into popular language, according to the form of my shears. After mature deliberation, I think I may take the following postulate as the foundation of all my ulterior philosophy: —

Whatever I may find in my nail-box, whether nails or whatever else relating to nails, if I am convinced that it is what it is necessarily, and must be as it is universally, that same thing, whatever it is, was not derived to my nail-box from external nature, but finds the reason of its existence in the formation and shape of my shears:

And, conversely, whatever I may find in that same nail-box, which is neither necessary nor universal, but variable and contingent, has its origin, and the reason of its existence, not in the formation and shape of my shears, but in the external world.

Having relieved itself of this postulate, the machine continues its meditations in silence.

The difference between the postulate of the nail-machine and that of the Königsberg philosopher is by no means great. Let us use them both in endeavoring to get at clearer conceptions of the position of our transcendental friends.

Do we not see all material objects under the relations of space? Is not space a necessary and universal form of all our sensible perceptions? But what says the postulate? The notion of space cannot come from the external world; for, if it did, it would not be attended with the conviction of universality and necessity with which it is attended. The notion of space comes, then, from the mind, and not at all from the outward world. (We speak as a Kantian.)

Space, then, has no outward existence; and the supposition that it has is mere hypothesis. We may treat time in the same manner; for time is the medium in which, universally and necessarily, we perceive events. Sensible objects and events are the iron, brass, the material of ideas — space and time are the form impressed by the shears. After all, what can we make of time and space? Simply this. Time and space are the intellectual spectacles through which we look on outward nature: they have no outward existence, but are media, perhaps distorting media, which we spread before our eyes whenever we look on the outward. (We give the Kantian statement.) But if space and time are mere media, perhaps distorting media, through which we perceive outward nature, all our sensible perceptions may be erroneous; and, if no new method of acquiring knowledge can be discovered, we may as well doubt of every thing. What shall we do, then? This is the question asked by several of our transcendentalists. The first course which presents itself to the mind is that of endeavoring to eliminate the elements of space and time from all our perceptions: but this is evidently impossible; for perception, divested of its form, becomes no perception at all, and vanishes. Space and time must, therefore, be *transcended*.

To follow a transcendental writer, we must not endeavor to find the logical connection of his sentences; for there is no such logical connection, and the writer himself never intended there should be. Many transcendental compositions read better backwards than they do forwards. We ought rather to

transcend space and time (if indeed we can), and follow the writer there. A transcendentalist never reasons: he describes what he sees from his own point of view. So the word "transcendentalism" relates not so much to a system of doctrines as it does to a *point of view;* from which, nevertheless, a system of doctrines may be visible. This explains to us why so many, notwithstanding their desire, have been unable to read the writings of the new school. They have tried to find a system of doctrines where they ought to have looked for a point of view.

But to return to our postulate. We see every thing as existing under the law of cause and effect. The fact of causation is universal and necessary; for every fact of experience gives us, on one side, its material, which comes from the out-world; and, on the other, its form, which comes always, in part, from the law of causation. Let the reader turn for a moment to the postulate of the nail-machine. He will find that every truth which lies in the mind with a conviction of its universality and necessity is derived to the mind from its own operations, and that it does not rest at all on observation and experience. But does not the truth, that every effect must have its cause, lie in the mind with a conviction of its universality and necessity? The consequence is clear. The law of causation is a distorting medium through which we look upon the out-world; and we have no legitimate authority for affirming that the external world is in any way subjected to that law. It is true that we are forced to look upon nature under that relation; but the necessity of the case arises, not from

the fact of the reality of the law of causation (we speak as a Kantian), but from the constitution of our nature. But here all positive knowledge is annihilated. An idea is good and valid, if we may have any confidence in these forms of the soul; but what is the relation of the form of the shears to the outward object independent of the machine? Who shall infer from the inward to the outward?

The system of Kant is one vast scepticism: admit the fatal postulate, and there is no dodging the conclusion. Our transcendentalists have not been unfaithful to the thought of their master. They mend the theory of Kant by carrying it out, and affirming (with the master) that the form of thought, and (against the master) that the thing thought of, are both of inward (subjective) origin.

Transcendentalism affirms that the soul creates all things, — man, the universe, all forms, all changes, — and that this wonderful power is possessed by each individual soul. But it may be asked, Will there not, then, be necessarily a confusion, a mixture of universes, arising from the conflict of the creative energies of distinct souls? This difficulty may be made to vanish. Suppose, for a moment, that I have a magical power over some great public building, — the City Hall, for example; suppose every one of its parts, by a pre-existing harmony, to be made obedient to my will, so that when I will the windows to open and shut, the doors to turn on their hinges, &c., they immediately do it: would not this City Hall, thus immediately obedient to my will, be a new body with which I am invested? Suppose I have power

over a dog in the moon, so that he barks, runs, wags his tail, according to the action of my will: am I not existing "in this dim spot which men call earth," and also, at the same time, in "the orbed maiden whom mortals call the moon"? In the first case, I exist as a man; in the second, as an animal of the canine species. Without doubt, I may have millions of bodies; there is no difficulty in the matter: all that I operate upon by immediate magical power, *by magia*, to use the phrase of Jacob Behmen, is to me a body. So I may be in this world a man, and in the moon a dog: yet am I not two, but one; for one soul animates the two bodies. But mark! While I am immersed in things of time and sense, paying no regard to the soul, which is under and behind all, I think the man who is now moving about, trading and travelling on earth, to be myself; and only after deep thought, fasting, and meditation, do I find that I am also a dog. But here mysteries thicken. I am not only both a man and a dog: I am also neither a man nor a dog; for I am the soul that speaks through both. "What we commonly call man," says Mr. Emerson, "the eating, drinking, planting, counting man, does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect; but the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend." The man, therefore, who has attained to right knowledge, is aware that there is no such thing as an individual soul. There is but one soul, which is the "Over-Soul;" and this one Soul is the animating principle of all bodies. When I am thoughtless,

and immersed in things which are seen, I mistake the person who is now writing these sentences for myself: but, when I am wise, this illusion vanishes like the mists of the morning; and then I know that what I thought to be myself was only one of my manifestations, only a mode of my existence. It is I who bark in the dog, grow in the tree, and murmur in the passing brook. Think not, my brother, that thou art diverse and alien from myself; it is only while we dwell in the outward appearance that we are two: when we consider the depths of our being, we are found to be the same; for the same self, the same vital principle, animates us both. (We speak as a transcendentalist.) I create the universe; and thou also, my brother, createst the same; for we create, not two universes, but one; for we two have but one soul: there is but one creative energy, which is above, and under, and through all.

This is no new theory. This doctrine was well known in the East before history began. No man can tell when it arose; for it is, perhaps, as old as thought itself. "Rich," say the Vedas, "is that universal self whom thou worshippest as the soul." We should strive, therefore, to disentangle ourselves from the world of matter, from the bonds of time and space, that we may take our stand at once in the "Over-Soul," which we are, did we but know it. We are the Over-Soul; and we come to our own native home when we attain to our true point of view, where the whole universe is seen to be our body. Then do we know of a truth that it is we who think, love, laugh, bark, growl, run, crawl, rain, snow, &c., &c. Mr.

Emerson has given a beautiful expression to this thought: —

> "There is no great and no small
> To the Soul that maketh all:
> And, where it *cometh*, all things are;
> And it *cometh* everywhere."

"There is one mind," says Mr. Emerson in his Essay on History, "common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same, and to all of the same. He that is once admitted to the right of reason is made a freeman of the whole estate. What Plato has thought, he may think; what a saint has felt, he may feel; what at any time has befallen any man, he can understand. *Who hath access to this universal Mind is a party to all that is or can be done; for this is the only and sovereign Agent.*"

It may easily be seen that this amounts to an identification of man with God. Yet this system is by no means pantheistic: perhaps, indeed, we may be permitted to coin a new term, and call it *human pantheism.* Pantheism sinks man in God, — makes him to be a phenomenon of the divine existence; but this system, so far from being an absorption of humanity in God, *is an absorption of God in the human soul.* A pantheistic friend once explained to me the difference between his system and that of the transcendentalists. "I hold myself," he said, "to be a leaf, blown about by the winds of change and circumstance, and holding to the extreme end of one of the branches of the tree of universal existence; but these gentlemen (referring to the transcendentalists) *think themselves to be some of the sap.*"

Let us go up higher, and examine this doctrine as it manifested itself in the Oriental world; let us examine it in its bearings upon the problem of the soul's future existence. It is written in the Vedas, "The soul should be known; that is, it should be distinguished from Nature: for then it will not return; it will not return." In this passage, under a form peculiar to the East, we find the enunciation of one of the fundamental problems of philosophy (that of the immortality of the soul) with the indication of a solution. It is the general belief of the Orientals, that the soul of a dying man, after leaving this present body, will be born again into the world under some new form. A man, in his next body, may be a man, a horse, or a dog; and this re-birth, whether in the old or under a new form, is the *return* of the soul. The expiation of certain crimes consists, according to the description in the laws of Menu, in the soul's living a thousand successive lives in the bodies of a thousand different spiders. The prospect, therefore, is by no means agreeable; and we cannot wonder that the whole force of the Oriental mind should have been directed to the discovery of some means whereby the *return* of the soul might be avoided.

In all ages of the world there have been philosophers who held that the *soul builds the body;* that is, that the character and form of the body are dependent on the character of the soul. The diametrically opposite doctrine is, indeed, more fashionable at this time: for many of our phrenologists and other materialists believe that it is *the body which builds the soul;* that is, that the soul is a function of (depend-

ent upon) some portion of the organism, — say the brain, for example. An appeal is made, in both cases, to observation and experience. The phrenologist, from an examination of the skull, will give a pretty shrewd guess as to the character of its owner: the idealist, on the contrary, will call our attention to the fact that the indulgence of certain passions alters the conformation of the face and the expression of the figure. The idealist says that the man who acquires the disposition of a fox will begin to look like a fox; will begin to become a fox as far as such a transformation is compatible with human nature. It is in the nature of spirit, says the idealist, to express itself in some form; and, as we are all rendered free at death, why should we not, in the next birth, take the form best adapted to express our inward natures? Why should not the man who is, in heart, a fox, take in the next birth the outward form of a fox? Why should not a fierce, bloody man be born the next time as a bull-dog? and a woman, who has no desire except for dress and display, be born as a peacock? Are their souls immortal? Yea, perhaps; but their present desires may remain with them, for their happiness or misery, throughout eternity. Conversely, a man of pure and angelic character begins inevitably to present a pure and angelic appearance; the countenance becomes placid, the manner sedate; and the soul of the man transforms his body till it becomes as angelic as is compatible with its present relations: and, when it assumes a new form after death, what shall prevent it from assuming the one most appropriate to its nature?

Our transcendentalists hold, not only that the soul builds the body, but that it builds all things, — God, the universe, other men, &c. "In the order of thought," says Mr. Emerson, "the materialist takes his departure from the external world, and esteems a man as one product of that. The idealist takes his departure from his consciousness, and reckons the world as an appearance. . . . The experience of the idealist inclines him to behold the procession of facts you call the world as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible unsounded centre *in himself*, centre alike of him and of them, and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative value, relative to that aforesaid unknown centre *of him*." A little thought will convince the reader that the theory, that the soul builds the body, is as plausible and as probable as the other doctrine, that the body builds the soul. In short, subjective-idealism is just as true as materialism; and we may add, just as false. As is evident, if we start with man alone, our reasonings will leave us, at the end, in transcendentalism (subjective-idealism); and, if we take our departure in nature alone, we end, of necessity, in materialism; both partial, exclusive, and inadequate systems. The fact is, the body builds the soul, and the soul builds the body; but (we will permit ourselves to add) it is God who builds both.

What reasoning, what train of thought, lay in the minds of the writers of the Vedas when they explained the method to be followed by men desirous of avoiding a *return* into this evil mansion of pain? Why did they suppose that a distinction of the soul

from Nature, by the exercise of thought, would be sufficient to overcome the necessity for a *return?* We will endeavor to give an answer to these questions. But it will be necessary to explain beforehand some of the peculiarities of the Oriental philosophy, and to fix the meaning of several unusual terms and phrases, in order that the reader may readily understand the somewhat obscure texts we shall find it necessary to quote. By means of these definitions, we trust we shall be able to set forth in a clear light the true nature both of transcendentalism and of Aryan Orientalism, and also to show that the two are really one.

The *invisible world*, or *world of potential existences*, of the Orientals, is precisely what Jacob Behmen, John Pordage, the Gnostics, and other Western theosophists, designate as *the abyss.* Now, in order to describe or illustrate the meaning of the words, *the abyss*, or the thing they designate, we must have recourse to the reader's own imagination ; for the transcendental philosophy proceeds from within outwards, from the thought and imagination to the existing fact, and not conversely. Let the reader, therefore, suppose, in thought, this visible universe to be broken. Let all the qualities by which we distinguish the differences subsisting among the different bodies of Nature be imagined as ceasing to manifest themselves. Let all properties, all activities in Nature, be figured as re-entering into themselves. Let all that by which each manifests its own proper existence fall back into the virtual state, so that all properties, all activities, exist no longer in act, but only in the *power*

of acting. Like a circle that contracts more and more till it vanishes in its own centre, let all extensions contract into — into what, O ye Powers! Let all qualities derived from extension, or which are manifested to us through extension, enter again into themselves. Let, in short, all properties of things be only in potentiality * of manifestation. When all outward things are thus conceived as existing in potentiality of manifestation, man also must be conceived as having ceased from all actual existence,† and must be figured (if figured at all) as having re-entered the potential state. In fact, how does man act? how does he manifest himself? He moves, eats, drinks, thinks, wills, remembers, hopes, loves, desires, &c. But can a man eat without eating something? or can he drink

* What is *potential* existence? What is *actual* existence? What is the difference between potential and actual existence? A thing exists *potentially*, or *in potentia*, when it is *possible* only. This same thing exists *actually* when it has not only this possible (potential) existence, but also a real existence *in act*.

† What is the difference in signification between the terms essence and existence? Essence is pure being, without efflux or manifestation. Existence involves outgoing, or manifestation. The soul of man, and every other substance, according to the foundation of its being, according to its centre or root, *is;* but according to its outgoings, manifestations, or operations, it *exists*. A thing *is* when *in potentia*, or when possessing only a possible *existence;* but it *exists* when it has not only its root of substance or being, but also an actual manifestation.

The foregoing definition of the word *essence* is the one given by Swedenborg, the Gnostics, and other theosophers, and is not at all the same with the one given by the schoolmen. The scholastic definition of the term, the one adopted by Spinoza, who scorns the gnosis, is as follows:—

Essence is that without which a particular thing cannot be what it is. A clock and a turnspit may be constructed of like materials; but it is *essential* to a clock that it should mark the regular divisions of time: if a clock lose its capability of keeping time, it ceases to be *quoad* clock, although it may still be utilized for communicating an irregular movement of rotation.

if he do not drink something? Can he move without moving through some space, or moving something; viz., his body? Can he love, hope, desire, think, without thinking, hoping, loving, desiring something? When all things are in the potential state, this something, which is necessary to all his actions, is withdrawn: and, as man cannot act or manifest himself without the concurrence of this something, he must also himself cease from all action, all manifestation; he must himself, in like manner, re-enter the potential state. Conceive, if you can, that you are removed in some distant region of space where nothing can come into contact with you; where the light of the stars of heaven is extinguished; where the undulations of the all-pervading ether cease to operate; where all motion, all change, all springing sources, have re-entered into themselves: conceive, also, your memory to be so blotted out that the voices of the past sound no longer: conceive that no fact remains present to the mind on which to base an inference in regard to the future. Would you live, act, think, or desire? *Of what* would you think? or *what* would you desire? All these objects of thought and desire have entered, according to the supposition, into the potential state, and manifest themselves no longer to you. Evidently you have entered, as far as is possible this side the gates of death, into the potential state, into the invisible world, into the abyss.

When we thus conceive this universe to be broken, to have returned into its original essence, but non-existence; when we conceive man also to have ceased from all actual existence, — we shall perceive all our

representations, humanity, the outward world, ourselves, all thought, all desire, re-entering into each other, so as to exist thenceforth only in germ, only in potentiality of existence. Man and the universe will be effaced together; all things will enter the potential state simultaneously: for the human intelligence reflects the universe; and the re-entering of the universe into the potential state will be marked by the smooth surface of the mirror (the mind of man), which gives thenceforth no reflection, which marks thenceforth no change.

Thus beings become one being in potentiality of manifestation. Yet, when we say *one* being, our words must not be taken with too much strictness. Nature and man have re-entered into themselves, and all things exist only *in potentia:* they have become *one* being, insomuch as each is now a cause existing in potentiality of operation; *one* being, inasmuch as these causes are undistinguishable the one from the other, since all that can effect a distinction is swallowed up in the abyss of potentiality. But they are many beings, insomuch as they are the potentiality of a world involving diversity and change.

This one being, this world *in potentia*, is the *abyss* of Jacob Behmen, the *invisible world* of the Orientals.

"I am," says Kreeshna in the Bhagvat Geeta, "that which is the seed of all things in nature; and there is nothing, whether animate or inanimate, which is without me. But what, *O Arjoon!* hast thou to do with this manifold wisdom? I planted the universe with a single portion, and stood still. [The son of Pandoo then beheld within the mighty compound being, within the body of the God of gods, standing together, the whole universe, divided

forth into its vast variety.] I see thyself, says *Arjoon*, on all sides, of infinite shape, formed with abundant arms and bellies and mouths and eyes; but I can neither discover thy beginning, thy middle, nor again thy end, O universal Lord, form of the universe!"

The following extract from the Laws of Menu is clear, and shows the distinction between the potential and actual worlds; the first being the substance and seed of the latter, and the latter being the former drawn out into actual relations: —

"They who are acquainted with day and night know that a day of Brahma is a thousand revolutions of the Yoogs, and that his night extendeth for a thousand more. On the coming-forth of that day, all things proceed from *invisibility* to *visibility:* so, on the approach of night, they are all dissolved away into that which is called *invisible*. The universe even, having existed, is again dissolved; and now again, on the approach of day, by divine necessity, it is reproduced. That which, upon the dissolution of all things else, is not destroyed, is superior and of another nature from that *visibility:* it is *invisible* and eternal. He who is thus called *Invisible* and Incorruptible is even he who is called the *Supreme Abode:* which men, having once obtained, they never more *return* to the earth: that is my mansion. That Supreme Being is to be obtained by him that worshippeth no other gods. In him is included all Nature; by him all things are spread abroad."

We give a few more extracts from the "Bhagvat Geeta:" —

"The great Brahm," says Kreeshna, "is my womb. In it I place my fœtus, and from it is the production of all Nature. . . . I am generation and dissolution; the place where all things are reposited, and the inexhaustible seed of all Nature. I am sunshine, and I am rain. I now draw in, and I now let out. I am death and immortality. I am entity and non-entity. . . . The ignorant,

being unacquainted with my supreme nature, which is superior to all things, and exempt from decay, believe me, who am *invisible*, to exist in the *visible* form under which they see me. . . . I am the creation and the dissolution of the whole universe. There is not any thing greater than I; and all things hang on me, even as precious gems on a string. I am moisture in the water, light in the sun and moon, invocation in the *Vedas*, sound in the firmament, human nature in mankind. In all things I am life, and I am zeal in the zealous; and know, O Arjoon! that I am the eternal seed of all Nature. . . . I will now tell thee what is *Gnea*, or the object of wisdom; *from which understanding thou wilt enjoy immortality.* This is that which has no beginning, and is separate, even *Brahm*, who can neither be called *sat* (ens) nor *asat* (non-ens). Unattached, it containeth all things; and, without quality, it partaketh of every quality. It is undivided; yet in all things it standeth divided. It is wisdom, — that which is the object of wisdom, and that which is to be obtained by wisdom."

We may illustrate this doctrine still further by commenting on the following extract from Dupuis. That author says, —

"Amid the shadows of a dark night, when the heavens are covered with a thick cloud, when all bodies have disappeared from our eyes, and we seem to dwell alone with ourselves and with the black shadows which surround us, what is then the measure of our existence? How much does it differ from an entire annihilation, especially when memory and thought do not surround us with the images of objects which the day revealed to us? *All is dead to us; and we ourselves are, in a certain manner, dead to Nature.* What can give us *life*, and draw our soul from this mortal weakness which chains down its activity in the shadows of chaos? A single ray of light can restore us to ourselves, and to Nature, which seemed so far removed from us. Behold the principle of our true existence, without which our *life* would be but the sentiment of a prolonged ennui. It is this need of light, it is its creative energy, which has been felt by all men; for they have seen nothing more

frightful than its absence. Behold their first Divinity, whose brilliant splendor, sparkling forth from the bosom of chaos, caused to proceed thence man and the universe, according to the theological principles of Orpheus and of Moses."

The thought here expressed is simple; but its power is inexhaustible. We need not dwell on the view of the nature of *life* which is so clearly and beautifully expressed; for we shall have much to say of it hereafter. But we would ask Dupuis, Is there nothing but *light* which can expel this obscure gloom? is there nothing but *light* which can deliver man from this nugatory abyss of potential existence? How much is involved in the expression, "especially when memory and thought do not surround us with the images of objects which the day revealed to us"? A single ray of light would indeed restore us to reality, to communion with nature; but would not the remembrance of a single object seen in the day awaken the soul to a real life, though not to an immediate communion with nature? While we are in this state of darkness and of silence, this state of dreaming without dreams, the whole *expanse*, if we may so speak, of memory, is spread before the inner eye, but without form, and, as it were, void. No distinct image is present to the mind; and all our conceptions lie in the memory and imagination (which is another form, or rather a modification of memory), in the mere *potentiality* of existence as actual conceptions. If we begin to act mentally, if we begin to form to ourselves a picture or conception, the facts of memory rise up before us; and, taking the isolated parts, we bring them together, — perhaps in new forms by the

exercise of imagination, perhaps in the reproduction of some well-known collocation by the exercise of simple memory.

This vast and apparently empty (as in the case supposed by Dupuis) *expanse* of memory, which stretches out before the inward eye when we seem to cease from all thought, is *as* the invisible or potential world, *as* the abyss. This empty *expanse*, containing the germ of all our conceptions, is a similitude, a correspondency, of the *invisible world* of the Orientals. But the invisible world is the seed of all nature; while the vacant expanse, or world, of memory and imagination, is finite, and the seed of the conceptions of the individual man only. The whole universe is contained, *in potentia*, in the abyss: in like manner, in this field of memory are contained *potentially* all those elements which go to make up the conceptions formed by the mind when it enters into operation.

According to the Oriental theology as perfected by Sakyamuni (and Buddhism is the only Indian doctrine that has profoundly influenced the current of thought in Western Asia and in Europe), a man must, in this world, crucify every affection, every tendency, and endeavor to be, at the moment of death, in the state described in the quotation from Dupuis: thus, and thus only, can he escape *the return*, the necessity of transmigrating. "At the end of life," says Kreeshna, who is the Abyss, "he who, having abandoned his mortal frame, departeth thinking only of me, without doubt *goeth unto me;* or else, if he think not of me, but of other things, whatever nature he shall thus call upon at the end of life, when

he shall quit his mortal frame, *he shall go into it.*" When a man dies who is without affection, whose mind is fixed upon the Abyss, upon the universal unity of indifference, he will not take any form (for he has no particular character or tendency), but will at once enter into the potential state. But this re-entrance into the potential state seems to be annihilation (though the essence of the soul subsists) rather than immortality. Kreeshna is the Abyss; and the highest state of future happiness held out by the "Bhagvat Geeta" consists in a return into Kreeshna. In this state of essence without existence we should indeed be free from the danger of migration, for we should be thenceforth free from all relations whatever; but no future *life* is compatible with such an order of being. We should like to know how our transcendentalists answer the objections brought against the doctrine of the "Bhagvat Geeta." Their whole desire is to re-enter into themselves; to be absolved from all dependency upon any thing which is not themselves. How do they escape the Abyss? How do they avoid a return into Kreeshna, into "the Supreme Abode"? Their only argument for immortality is the metaphysical one, derived from the fact of the soul's simplicity: but this proves only that the soul's being is imperishable; it proves nothing in relation to a future *life.*

Here are some intimations of the rule of conduct which ought to be followed by the aspirant after immersion in Kreeshna: —

"Those men of regulated lives," says Kreeshna, "whose sins are done away, being freed from contending passions, *enjoy me.*

. . . He, O Arjoon! who, from conviction, acknowledgeth my divine birth and actions, doth not, upon his quitting his mortal frame, enter into another; for *he entereth into me*. . . . They who serve me with adoration, *I am in them, and they in me.** . . . Wise men who have abandoned all thought of the fruit which is produced from their actions are freed from the chains of birth, and go to the regions of eternal happiness. . . . A man is said to be confirmed in wisdom when he forsaketh every desire which entereth into his heart, and of himself is happy, and contented in himself. . . . The wisdom of that man is established, who, in all things, is without affection; and, having received either good or evil, neither rejoiceth at the one, nor is cast down by the other. His wisdom is confirmed, when, like a tortoise, he can draw in all his members, and restrain them from their wonted purposes. The hungry man loseth every object but the gratification of his appetite; and, when he is become acquainted with the Supreme, he loseth even that. . . . The man whose passions enter his heart as the waters run into the unswelling, passive ocean, obtaineth happiness. . . . The man whose mind is led astray by the pride of self-sufficiency thinketh that he himself is the executor of all those actions which are performed by the principles of his constitution; but the man who is acquainted with the two distinctions of cause and effect will give himself no trouble. . . . The man who, employed in the practice of works, is of a purified soul and a subdued spirit, *and whose soul is the universal soul*, is not (injuriously) affected by so being."

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* See St. John's Gospel, ch. xiv. 20, and ch. xvii. 21. Recent investigators profess themselves able to show that the Bhagvat Geeta is of much later origin than has heretofore been supposed. It appears, now, to be probable, not that the writers of the New Testament were influenced by the Bhagvat Geeta, but that the writer of the Bhagvat Geeta was influenced (not in this passage only, but in many others) by the style of St. John's Gospel. The *substance*, however, of the philosophic doctrines of the Bhagvat Geeta may be traced back among the Buddhists, to a date more than seven hundred years before the coming of our Lord.

This pamphlet was written in 1845 or 1846; and the author, at that time, supposed the Bhagvat Geeta to be a very ancient book.

"This whole world was spread abroad by me," says Kreeshna, "in my *invisible* form. All things depend on me, and I am not dependent upon them. Behold my divine connection. My creative spirit is the keeper of all things, not the dependent. Understand that all things rest in me, as the mighty air, which passeth everywhere, resteth in the ethereal space. At the end of the formation, at the end of the day of Brahma, all things, O son of Koontee! return into my primordial source; and, at the beginning of another formation, I create them all again I plant myself in my own virtue, and create, again and again, this assemblage of beings, this whole, from the power of Nature without power. Those works confine not me; because I am like one that sitteth aloof, uninterested in those works. By my supervision, Nature produceth both the movable and the immovable. It is from this source, O Arjoon! that the universe resolveth."

Buddhism, as it seems to us, is the true conclusion, and the logical halting-place, for all these speculations. The Buddhists teach that the universe is brought into the possession of such existence as it has through the disintegration of the Aboriginal Nothing by means of another subsequent nothing. The first Nothing is the Abyss of potentiality: the subsequent nothing is *error*. The world commences by the fact that essences lost in the indifference of mere potential being, become deluded into a belief of their own and each other's existence. Their error gradually becomes stronger and stronger; and at the same time, by reason of their error, the universe appears to thicken and harden little by little, and to seemingly pass into actuality. But this actuality is not reality; it is mere grossness of error; it is *maya*, illusion. The universe is nothing. Man's body, and the worlds, exist only in erroneous supposition. The reality of

the worlds is only such as is given in the formula, actuality $= 0 \times 0$. Evil, sorrow, and pain have their abiding-place nowhere but in actual worlds. The actual universe is therefore the substance of evil, if evil can properly be said to have any substance. The way of salvation is therefore plain. It is the path of knowledge; for knowledge destroys error, and, consequently, the visible universe which is founded in error, as light dispels darkness. The perception of visible things is a mistaken prejudice, bred from unreasoning habit. As man progresses in knowledge, error diminishes, and the world and himself recede towards potential existence; and, when man becomes perfect in knowledge, error is abolished, and man, and the world so far as it concerns man, re-enter the abyss together, and cease to exist.

The Buddhists designate the original nothing by the word *nirvana: va*, to blow; *nir*, out. The soul attains beatitude when it reaches *nirvana;* when it becomes like the flame of a candle that has been *blown out;* when it becomes defunct, extinct, nothing. It comes from nothing, it is nothing, and it goes to nothing.

We have nothing to say in praise or dispraise of Buddhism; but we will conclude our remarks by observing that its doctrines, though transcendently spiritual, are not at all the Christian doctrines which proclaim the existence of a living God, and a future of eternal life for the human soul, but, on the contrary, their distinct negation.

It is estimated that there are in the world more than three hundred and fifteen million adherents of

the Buddhist faith: the Christians, counting all denominations, are supposed to number less than half as many. Buddhism is the religion of the vast countries between the Himalaya Mountains and the boundaries of Siberia, of the majority of the people in the great empire of China, the religion of the empire and people of Japan, of the States in and near the peninsula of Farther India, and of many of the islands south and east of Farther India. It is hard to believe that the most widely diffused religion in the world, and the one which, after Christianity, is the most spiritual of any, the most favorable to civilization, the most effectually moral, and the one that has awakened in its missionaries the greatest enthusiasm, followed by the greatest amount of self-denial and self-sacrifice, is a religion professedly founded on speculative atheism; but such appears to be the established fact.

TRANSCENDENTALISM.

BY

WILLIAM B. GREENE.

"Rich is that universal self whom thou worshippest as the soul."

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